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ABSTRACT

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RIVAL HYPOTHESES ABOUT TEACHING AND FACILITATING LEARNING

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For presentation at the annual meetings of the Pacific Sociological Association, San Francisco, April 11, 1980.

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RIVAL HYPOTHESES ABOUT TEACHING AND FACILITATING LEARNING

by Carl Slawski

Typical Assumptions of Teachers and Students on Modes of Teaching Undergraduates in Large Public Universities.	My principles, ideals, and rules of Facilitating Learning (applied to sociology).
PHILOSOPHY	PHILOSOPHY
1. The course outline is sacred.	1. A good idea conceived by the learner takes precedence over all the following hypotheses and rules.
2. The teacher in each course will tell you what to learn, when and how. A. If in doubt, keep asking the teacher what he wants you to do.	2. The burden of learning is on you the learner.
3. Passive listening and note-taking are the best ways to learn. A. Students will read books only when required and when they are forced to do so by grading them.	3. A student who does not actively participate in class activities (at least by speaking up and volunteering opinions in buzz groups) or who does not contribute to the understanding of his fellow students (including the "facilitator") is failing in one of his most important duties.
4. Knowledge is gained in blocs of credit hours.	4. School is a place with resources to help you to learn how to learn. A. The facilitator is primarily a resource person to be treated as a colleague as far as your background will allow.
5. School is a place to get a degree to get a better job.	5. Burning curiosity, love of learning and a pure desire to know are noble motives.
6. The teacher is the boss.	6. I will play the authoritarian parent role only as far as you and the system demand it.
A. Other students don't know any more than you do.	A. Friendly cooperation takes precedence over rivalry and competition.

7. The best way to learn something is by listening to the lecture. (3 hours per week).	7. The larger the repertoire of practical experience of life and work which each learner brings to the classroom (or meeting place), the more real will be the experience for all present.
8. The arrival of the age of TV and computers means that no one will read what a non-professional writes. So why bother. Leave that to the English teachers in the high schools! There are too many students anyway and we're not paid to teach writing skills in this department or major.	8. Learning to write clearly and concisely is a very high priority , and a mark of a well-educated person. A. I emphasize this in practice by the tasks I suggest in almost all classes I teach.
9. Creative work will have to be postponed until postgraduate school or actual on-the-job work. Meanwhile, students cannot afford to buy or read very many books. There's no time to go to the library.	9. A certain quantity of work is almost always necessary to prepare the seed bed of ideas, to saturate your brain with the grounds for creative thinking. Yes, I admit that a good idea often comes apparently painlessly. But I don't know how to facilitate that kind of peak experience without previous saturation.
10. Only experts, geniuses, Nobel Prize Winners and highly specialized research professors at the University of California will likely ever have an original idea.	10. To learn to formulate original problems and hypotheses for yourself is the turning point and steppingstone to creativity. I will try to encourage this above almost any other goal within the limits of the required course structure.
11. The teacher must know more than his students because he is paid to do so.	11. If I seem to know more than some folks about my subject matter it's probably because I work harder at it. A. If I don't know much about some things that you know about, please help me out. I want to benefit from your unique talent, experience and knowledge.

12. Professors make friends only with the rare, outstanding graduate students. Too much fraternizing is unprofessional.

13. School is only a stepping-stone to be cleared on the path to the credential which then allows you to begin a productive life.

12. My best friends are current and former students. I'm not such a bad guy once you get to know me.

13. School is a worthwhile part of life in itself.

CONTENT

1. Sociology provides answers to social problems.

2. Theory is best reserved for theory courses in the senior years.

3. Meanwhile, facts about social problems are what should be taught.

4. Separate courses and logical sequencing is the best way to "train" students. Integrative course content and interdisciplinary work is good only for Honors students.

5. A memory for disparate facts and textbook answers is the key to academic success. Discussion is best reserved for graduate seminars in philosophy.

CONTENT

1. It is more important to know about society than about sociology, though the discipline is a wonderful microcosm of the conflicts in our society.

2. The theories most requiring help to learn ought to be the most crucial part of every course offered.

3. Theories are all that distinguish sociology from journalism and history.
A. Theories without application are empty. Applications (or the study of social problems) without theory are blind.

4. Theory, method, policy and application ought to be integral parts of every sociology course, along with personal expressions of feeling about the content, process and personal success or failure along the way to integration.

5. To learn to <u>think critically</u> and to base conclusions on solid <u>theory</u> and <u>evidence</u> is not only more important than memorizing facts and learning mechanical skills , it is also the major <u>distinctive mark</u> of a sociological approach.

6. Summaries of professionals' research make the best kind of term papers.

6. Personal journals and reaction papers when related to some sociological theory are always more interesting to read.
A. Standard, pieced-together, traditional term papers are utterly boring.

PROCEDURES

1. Any mistake you make will lower your grade.
A. The undergraduate teaching load is too great to allow revisions except in very special cases.

PROCEDURES

1. A student has a right to make a mistake.
A. I allow students a chance to rewrite papers turned in a week or more ahead of the assigned due date. Due dates are otherwise only strong reminders, not a basis for grading (unless otherwise stated). Late papers though most often lead to later falling short on course performance and knowledge of the subject matter.

2. Grades are very important because they measure ability and may help you get a better job.

2. Diagnosis of learner needs is more important than grades.
A. Frequent feedback is the best means to help keep the learner on the right track, or at least off known dead-end roads.
B. I try to use grades as incentives to higher quality work for the less ambitious (rather than as punishment for all but the brightest and luckiest WASP's).

3. High grades will be received by good students who can outguess or psych out the professor. There is little that can be done to help the weak student to become a good student except perhaps for his employer to require high grades for promotion.

3. I grade on definite criteria, using qualitative standards (such as, 1) logical method, organization and clarity of presentation, however indirect and mystical and feeling-oriented the content may be, 2) application of a sociological or social psychological theory or explanatory hypotheses to some concrete instance of change in a person or group over time, 3) use of valid evidence to demonstrate your hypotheses.

A. College teaching is almost exclusively cognitive in orientation.

4. Grades are a good indication of your mental capability. A superior person will nearly always have a high GPA.

5. Large enrollments are the best sign of a good teacher, along with high marks at the end of the semester on item 39 of the ETS evaluation form (on teacher effectiveness).

6. The teacher sets up the course outline and determines requirements and tasks for each class day.

7. Students learn best by being told their mistakes on assignments, mainly by being told their work is worth an A, B, C, etc.

A. Teachers are best buttered up so they will give you a higher grade.

B. Student suggestions may be considered, But the best way to change a course is to give the teacher a low rating on the opinion survey at the end of the course.

PROCEDURES (cont.)

A. Journals or personal statements or reaction papers will be looked at more for plausibility and meaningfulness.

4. I grade your demonstrated level of competence, not your worth as a person.

A. Grades are sometimes and perhaps a necessary evil as a preparation of sorts for the judgments which will continually be made about you in the world of work.

5. If I must choose, I have to say it is more important that you learn something than that you like me, though I very much want to get to know you as a separate person as far as our time and energy allows.

6. <u>Participatory democracy</u> in the classroom is the best preparation for a broadly-based democracy in life outside the classroom.

A. College is not merely a hot house for semi-cultured adolescents.

7. <u>Criticism</u> which is not <u>constructive</u> and to some degree optimistic is of little value to the giver or receiver. This applies when I criticize your work or you mine.

A. I welcome constructive feedback made directly to me, though I resent mumbling, gossiping, talebearing, complaining, slander or other forms of defamation of character or reputation.

B. It is not only your right but your duty to tell me directly what you would like changed in the use of class time or other assignments within the limits of the course outline and university policy.

C. The teacher is usually always right because he has a higher degree. Questions will be entertained at his discretion (and whim).

D. Someday you may become a teacher yourself. And then you will want to make up your own rules.

PROCEDURES (cont.)

C. Mind-raping (of me by you or vice versa), mumbling and cynicism ought to be transformed into constructive criticism (and made to the person's face, or on the anonymous learning evaluation forms I provide three times each term, or in some other way which makes you feel most comfortable about making your suggestions).

D. Any questions about or suggestions for changing any of the previous hypotheses will be gladly received!